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**IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT: SEXUAL AWAKENING IN *SUMMER AND FOREVER***

by

**Katie Fredrickson**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree**

of

**DEPARTMENTAL HONORS**

in

**English Education  
Department of English**

**Approved:**

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Logan, UT**

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### Abstract

Edith Wharton's *Summer* and Judy Blume's *Forever*, although written more than fifty years apart, are strikingly similar in that both feature young, female characters who come of age during the novel. Both girls have important experiences as they mature, including their initiation into sex. As the two characters come of age, their experiences with sexuality and the consequences that follow shape them and the rest of their lives. It is also significant to look at how the authors portray the different awakenings, Wharton only implicitly hinting at what Blume quite clearly spells out. Ultimately, each girl's sexual awakening and the consequences that follow are more than a scandalous plot point; the awakenings are an illustration of the girls' respective societies and the level of freedom they experience within the constructed boundaries. Both are a reflection of the rights and options afforded to women--Wharton describing 1917 and Blume 1975. Wharton's young character happily tries to fight against a patriarchal society, but untimely fails. Decades later, Blume's novel would show the increased number of options for girls as well as the new problems that teen females might face.

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Katie Fredrickson

Logan, Utah

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### **Implicit and Explicit: Sexual Awakening in *Summer* and *Forever***

“But once more, as she spoke, she became aware that he was no longer listening. He came close and caught her to him as if he were snatching her from some imminent peril: his impetuous eyes were in hers, and she could feel the hard beat of his heart as he held her against it.

‘Kiss me again—like last night,’ he said, pushing her hair back as if to draw her whole face up into his kiss.’ (Wharton 109)

“The next night Michael picked me up at 7:30 and we headed straight for the apartment. I knew we would. Neither one of us could wait to be alone together. And when we were naked, in each other’s arms, I wanted to do everything—I wanted to feel him inside me. I don’t know if he sensed that or not but when he whispered, ‘Please, Kath . . . Please let’s keep going . . .’ I told him, ‘Yes, Michael . . . yes . . . but not here . . . not on the bed.’” (Blume 93-94)

Edith Wharton’s *Summer* and Judy Blume’s *Forever*, although written more than fifty years apart, each feature a young, female character who comes of age over the course of the novel. Both girls have many important experiences as they mature, including their initiation into the world of sexually activity. For both Charity and Kath, fictional characters in *Summer* and *Forever*, respectively, discovering their sexuality is an important part of growing up. As they come of age, the experiences and consequences of sex shapes them and the rest of their lives. Although both girls experience similar secretive love affairs, the experiences end up molding them and especially their futures in very different ways. Ultimately, each girl’s sexual awakening and the consequences that follow allow her to better understand society and her social position within it, sometimes with heart-breaking consequences. Each piece is in a way a reflection of the rights and options afforded to women, Wharton describing 1917 and Blume 1975. It is

surprising, then, that despite the strong similarities and social commentaries in these two novels, no critic has yet compared *Summer* and *Forever*.

It is important to note an essential difference between *Summer* and *Forever*, and that is the audiences for which each was intended. *Summer*, although dealing with an adolescent character, was written for an adult audience, while *Forever* is a novel about adolescents for adolescents. When Wharton was writing during the early twentieth century, there were no “juvenile” novels *per se*; they first appeared in 1933 (Nilsen 58). Even then, rarely did these “junior” books broach the subject of sexuality. Since that time, young adult novels have seen significant change. Nilsen and Donelson, noted scholars of young adult literature, explain the taboos that existed in books written for an adolescent audience before the 1960’s and 70’s:

Certain things were not to be mentioned—obscenity, profanity, suicide, sexuality, sensuality, homosexuality, protest against anything significant, social or racial injustice, or the ambivalent feelings of cruelty and compassion inherent in young adults and all people. Pregnancy, early marriage, drugs, smoking, alcohol, school dropouts, divorce, and alienation could be introduced only by implication and only as bad examples for thoughtful, decent young adults. Consequently, young adult books were often innocuous and pervaded by a saccharine didacticism. (62)

It wasn’t until the late sixties that young adult novels, like Hinton’s *The Outsiders* started to exhibit a “gritty realism” and to deal honestly with real issues (Nilsen 72). That *Summer* was written for an adult audience and *Forever* for a younger audience is important in that it also illustrates the growing differences and freedoms society allowed to its young women. Wharton’s young character happily tries to fight against a patriarchal society, but ultimately fails. Decades

later, Blume's novel would show the increasing number of options for young women in many different aspects of society.

### *Summer*

Life for women during 1917 was on the brink of change. It would only be three years later when women in every state would win the right to vote. It was also in 1917 that the first woman was elected to the House of Representatives (Carruth 654) and the first birth control clinic was open in New York by Margaret Sanger (Carruth 651). Even higher education was becoming more of an option for women; their enrollment in "colleges and universities between 1900 and 1920 increased by 1,000 percent in public institutions" (Ammons xix). However, the majority of women, especially those outside the city, still had few choices when it came to their future. Marriage and motherhood were the choices afforded to most coming of age women, especially in the rural places about which Wharton writes. Furthermore, sexual knowledge was generally forbidden to women. The author of *Summer* herself is an example: "Before she married Edward ('Teddy') Wharton, Edith was totally ignorant on the subject of sex—as she was supposed to be, given her sheltered upbringing and education" (Ammons x). Wharton's experiences in life and marriage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are the basis for much of her writing.

It is in this social context that Wharton wrote *Summer*. The novel tells the story of a young woman, Charity, and her short summer romance. Charity is a poor, uneducated girl from the sleepy, rural town of North Dormer, New England. Mr. and Mrs. Royall, a childless couple, rescue charity from an uncivilized life when they bring her down from the Mountain and the colony of lawless people living there. After Mrs. Royall dies, Charity remains in lawyer Royall's

care, always dependent on him for her survival. Although some people in the community think Charity should be sent to the nearest town to get an education, Charity doesn't go because lawyer Royall was a "dreadfully 'lonesome' man" whom Charity can't leave alone (Wharton 15). The patriarchy of the society puts his needs before Charity's; she remains poor and uneducated, always dependent on someone. When a young architect from the city, Lucius Harney, comes to draw the old houses of North Dormer, Charity first experiences sexual desire. From almost the first time they meet, the two become good friends who enjoy each other, despite Charity's constant feelings of inferiority and ignorance. As the romance of the young couple progresses, so does the couple's physical relationship--as well as the concern of lawyer Royall. Soon Charity and Harney are meeting in an old, abandoned house where Charity loses her virginity.

Kathleen Pheiffer writes, "that Charity is a failed heroine and her failure forms the locus of conflict" over the diverse, differing critical interpretations of *Summer* "among past and present critics. Charity's uniquely American failure becomes deeply disturbing because it suggests Wharton's own deep pessimism about America" (144). Her failure is American because she struggles for "autonomy, independence, and recognition," but she never achieves any of these ideals (Pheiffer 143). I agree with Pheiffer that Charity is a failed heroine but further her claim by highlighting the important role sex plays in the novel. It is important to understand that Charity's sexual awakening illustrates more than her choice to be with Harney. Charity's ability to provoke desire is the only power she has ever known, and her choice to be sexually active is her attempt to escape the "cramped setting of hypocrisy" that is North Dormer (Wharton 68). Wharton uses the implicit images of Charity's sexual awakening, such as flowers and nature, along with symbolism in names and strong images of doors and mirrors, to critique small town New England society and the lack of options and freedom that it afforded to all people,



especially young women such as Charity. Hall explains, “Despite her ardent wishes and desperate efforts to leave North Dormer, Charity is unsuccessful, which testifies to the strength of patriarchal institutions and to the extremely limited social and economic options for women” (12-13). Although a strong-willed character, Charity’s life is ruled by the men and social structure that surround her.

### **An Implicit Sexual Awakening**

Tracking Charity’s sexual awakening shows how Charity attempts to overcome the society she lives in. Although not sexually active at the beginning of the novel, Charity is aware of her sexuality and emotions from very early on. First, Charity is aware that her sexual appeal is what gives her power. Wharton explains that Charity “knew her power, knew what it was made of, and hated it” (14). Charity despises that her influence only comes from her physical appearance and ability to tempt men. Before Charity meets Harney, her lover, she “rule[s] in lawyer Royall’s house” because he craves her sexually (Wharton 14). Wharton demonstrates Royall’s sexual craving by having him enter Charity’s room one night when he is drunk. Charity, aware of what he wants, tells him she is not his wife (who has passed away), and that he needs to leave.

Second, Charity’s sexuality and the things that excite her is a product of the society that raised her. Rutland explains that, “this young woman [Charity] has no access to the things of culture that might have fed her spirit and helped her organize her perceptions of the world...What remains to Charity is her body, her capacity for rich sensory experience” (434). Therefore, Charity’s sexuality is embodied in her sensory experience. Charity knows the things, like “light and air, perfume and colour,” that get “every drop of blood in her” to respond

(Wharton 12). Wharton explains: “She [Charity] loved the roughness of the dry mountain grass under her palms, the smell of the thyme into which she crushed her face, the fingering of the wind in her hair and through her cotton blouse, and the creak of larches as they swayed to it” (12). This quote illustrates how Charity’s five senses are easily overwhelmed out in the natural world; it is the first instance where Wharton uses images of nature to suggest Charity’s sexuality. Hall explains, “Edith Wharton often associated feminine sexuality with flower imagery”; however, in *Summer* her imagery seems to include all parts of the natural world (Hall 10). But, Charity has no options within the bounds of society to experiment with her sexuality.

Although she has no place to experiment or validate her sexual feelings, Charity has continuing awareness of her sexuality as she recognizes her desire for Lucius Harney. On the night after they first meet, looking into the “square of looking-glass on the whitewashed wall,” Charity entertains a small fantasy: “A clumsy band and button fastened her unbleached nightgown about the throat. She undid it, freed her thin shoulders, and saw herself a bride in a low-necked satin, walking down an aisle with Lucius Harney. He would kiss her as they left the church” (24). Although Charity’s dream lays within the rules of society, with marriage coming before any physical action, during her reverie, Charity’s face “glowed like a rose in the faint orb of light” (24). Wharton again uses nature language to illustrate Charity’s sexuality as it begins to blossom, foreshadowing how for Charity, *natural* feelings and urges will eventually trump rules of society. By using nature language, Wharton gives us the sense that Charity’s feelings are expected and normal and that the taboos of society are contrived because they don’t recognize, validate, or educate a woman about her sexual identity.

Along the way to the loss Charity’s virginity, Charity does have certain opportunities from which she walks away. After lawyer Royall hints to Harney that it is time for him to leave

North Dormer, Charity goes to Harney's house and watches him through the window in a sort of "strange vigil"(Wharton 69). She chooses, however, not to enter: "In every pulse of her rigid body she was aware of the welcome his eyes and lips would give her; but something kept her from moving. It was not the fear of any sanction, human or heavenly; she had never in her life been afraid" (68). The decision Charity makes does not depend on what she has been taught by society to be proper. Charity doesn't go in because of "the wondering pride in his liking for her, the startled softness that his sympathy had put into her heart"; Harney seems to be leaving and Charity wants nothing to "deface the image of her that he carried away" (69). Instead, Charity chooses not to go to Harney because she wants him to think her perfect, and in her society, purity has always been associated with perfection.

However, two important things happen that cause Charity to change her mind. It is during the Fourth of July celebration when Charity secretly goes to a nearby city, Nettleton, to celebrate with Harney. She goes because she is "determined to assert her independence;" she is always fighting against the rules of society (Wharton 81). In Nettleton, everything is exciting and new to Charity. During the fireworks, Harney kisses Charity for the first time:

In the obscurity she felt her head clasped by two hands: her face was drawn backward, and Harney's lips were pressed on hers. With sudden vehemence he wound his arms about her, holding her head against his breast while she gave him back his kisses. An unknown Harney had revealed himself, a Harney who dominated her and yet over whom she felt herself possessed of a new mysterious power. (Wharton 97)

This first kiss is one of the important turning points that changes Charity's mind in her decision to be sexually involved with Harney. Charity feels his new dominating power, but she also thinks herself above the power he holds. In the exhilarating feeling of a kiss, Charity feels like she can

overcome the patriarchal bounds of her society; she at least feels equally powerful to her male counterpart.

The other important change comes when Mr. Royall, drunk and in the company of prostitutes, runs into Charity and Harney just after the fireworks. Royall sees the young couple on the wharf and calls Charity a “damn—bear-headed whore” in front of a group of “disreputable girls and bar-room loafers” as well as Harney (Wharton 98). The change, however, is in Charity, not in Harney as Grafton argues. She explains that “according to Freud, the male's need to degrade the love object stems from a ‘psychical impotence’ that has occurred due to an unacknowledged incestuous desire for his mother and/or sister,” and that this is why Harney can now spoil Charity (Grafton 2). Instead, Charity rebels because she sees the stark injustices of her society. She has been caught out in her assignation with Harney in a different town, and she rebels. Charity’s relationship with Harney until now has still been ‘honorable,’ within the mores of her society, but Royall’s accusation causes Charity to feel the inequality in her society. Walker points out: “As Charity is aware, ‘it was the fact of having lived in Nettleton that made lawyer Royall, in spite of his infirmities, the strongest man in North Dormer’ (pp. 34-35). Charity understands that power is related to position; that reputation is seldom based on innate worth” (110). In the bounds of current society, lawyer Royall, the most respected individual in North Dormer, can lead a disreputable life without consequence, while Charity lives honorably but experiences slander and humiliation. This realization is the change that allows Charity to submit willingly to Harney.

At her earliest opportunity, Charity flees to the Mountain, the place Charity sees as free from the unreasonable and impossible aspects of society. There, she hopes to find more freedom and justice. Wharton illustrates the Mountain as a wild and lawless place, devoid of Western

social structure (Ammons xxii). Susan L. Hall of Cornell University also interprets the mountain this way. She writes that “The Mountain community is portrayed as outside the bounds of civilization” (12). The people who live in the small colony “seem to be quite outside the jurisdiction of the valleys” there is “no school, no church—and no sheriff ever goes up to see what they’re about” (Wharton 42). The people who live there live without the typical structure and rules that dominate the society of North Dormer below. This is why it is significant that Charity runs to the Mountain when she realizes the impossibility of living in the society that doesn’t protect her.

However, it is on her way up to the Mountain that Harney overtakes her. They go to the small, abandoned house by the side of the road, and it is here that Charity experiences her sexual awakening. Hall explains how “their relationship falls far outside of social sanctioning, a point which Wharton conveys through the setting of their rendezvous” (11). The abandoned house, on the way up to the mountain, is representative of Charity and Harney’s relationship in that it is unsanctioned and must be kept a secret.

In addition, Wharton’s uses implicit language in describing Charity’s sexual awakening. Wharton’s language never gets more explicit than explaining simple embraces and kisses between Charity and Harney. Wharton writes: “He had his arms about her, and his kisses were in her hair and on her lips. Under his touch things deep down in her struggled to the light and sprang up like flowers in sunshine” (188-19). Wharton stops describing the actions between Charity and Harney and instead describes the way Charity is changed, again using the images of nature.

Her willingness to submit is not based on, as Grafton claims, “Charity's overwhelming fascination with the forbidden,” but rather her desire to be an individual with rights (4). Charity

experiences feelings of freedom, something she has longed for but been denied. Charity's sexual awakening creates a new world for her; "the only reality was the wondrous unfolding of her new self, the reaching out to the light of all her contracted tendrils" (116). It is clear that, through her romantic affair with Harney, Charity finds a part of her that she had no access to before. Her experiences with Harney allow her to explore and think about herself as an individual for the first time; these changes are imperative to Charity's maturity and coming of age.

But Charity's summer is short, and as fall draws near, so does the end of her relationship with Harney and her experience with freedom. Walker explains that "in a negative sense, the seasonal cycle reinforces the theme of Charity's entrapment by circumstances. The novel begins with the promise of summer and ends with the closing in of autumn" (113). With the coming autumn, Charity becomes fully entrapped in her society. The end of Charity's freedom starts when lawyer Royall finds the two in the abandoned house and rebukes both Charity and Harney by asking when they plan on getting married and if they plan to live in the old abandoned house when they do. In defense, Harney claims: "Miss Royall is not a child. Isn't it rather absurd to talk of her as if she were? I believe she considers herself free to come and go as she pleases, without any questions from anyone" (Wharton 134). But the unfortunate truth is that society's norms work to keep Charity submissive and childlike, always dependent on someone else. Charity and Harney's short affair makes Charity feel a sense of freedom only temporarily. As she is pulled back into the rules of her society, Charity is portrayed as a child, weak and submissive.

Along the way, Wharton hints at this darker side to the affair, but it is only when the affair must end, that it is fully realized. Charity craves independence, but she won't get it through being with Harney because Charity and Harney's relationship is founded on dependence: "From the first she had needed him more than he had wanted her" (150). Charity, even in her joyous

romance, is still dependent on someone else. Furthermore, Charity loses her ability to make choices. Charity starts to “imagine no reason for doing or not doing anything except the fact that Harney wished or did not wish it” (Wharton 133). Even during her sexual awakening, Charity’s path is not liberating. Wharton describes the affair as a “poor romance” filled with “foolish things” (150) where Charity follows a “fatalistic acceptance of his [Harney’s] will” (113). Although the affair helps Charity to realize herself, it cannot free her from society’s grasp. “She had given him all she had—but what was it compared to the other gifts life held for him? She understood now the case of girls like herself to whom this kind of thing happened. They gave all they had, but their all was not enough: it could not buy more than a few moments...” (Wharton 128).

### **Consequences of the Awakening**

In the end, Harney leaves Charity to go back to the city, seemingly with the best of intentions but spouting empty promises about marriage. Once Harney is gone, however, Charity realizes the first physical consequence of her awakening: the “grave surprise of motherhood,” (Wharton 146). She also realizes and accepts the impossibility of their ever getting married. Now, Charity is left with few options. Charity can’t find a job and support the baby on her own; “she had never learned any trade that would have given her independence in a strange place, and she knew no one in the big towns of the valley, where she might have hoped to find employment” (Wharton 103). Nor does Charity want to do as Julia Haws did, who, after getting pregnant out of wedlock, is reduced to prostitution. Not knowing what to do, Charity again sees the Mountain as her only hope. As Charity walks to the Mountain, she realizes that “there was no sense of guilt in her now, but only a desperate desire to defend her secret from irreverent eyes,

and begin life again among people to whom the harsh code of the village was unknown” (Wharton 155). Charity does not regret her summer of passion; she only desperately wants to escape the structure and rules of society more than ever.

Charity makes it to the top of the Mountain on the same night that her mother dies. There, Charity witnesses the makeshift funeral and grave. Realizing she feels no connection to this woman as she thought she would and that everything on the Mountain seems pitiable, miserable and depressing, Charity decides the mountain is not her *home* after all. After spending only one night on the Mountain, Charity sees the “savage misery of the Mountain farmers” (Wharton 170). It is at this point that society beats Charity: she knows of its injustices and oppression, yet she also understands its necessity. Peter L. Hays clarifies: “Her mother’s death coincides with the death of her youthful romanticism, egotism, and rebellion” (118). But it is more than her mother’s death that ends her youthful romanticism; it is also the coming birth of her baby. “The bodily burden of her child ... was like a load that held her down, and yet like a hand that pulled her to her feet;” it is as though her unborn child forces her to continue in the oppressive society despite the misery she knows it will bring (Wharton 173). Charity completely gives up her romantic ideas of freedom and choice and slowly makes her way back down the mountain to the sleepy town of North Dormer.

Before long, lawyer Royall finds her en route. He puts her into the carriage, and together they make their way down the Mountain. Again, lawyer Royall proposes to Charity. Without any other options, Charity doesn’t agree or disagree; she only follows lawyer Royall “obediently,” (Wharton 181) and “passively as a tired *child*” (Wharton 180, emphasis added). Royall takes her to the nearest town, where Charity feels “a ring that was too big for her being slipped on her thin finger. She understood then that she was married” (Wharton 182). Wharton’s language around



the marriage shows the change in Charity from the rebellious, independent woman that characterized her in the beginning to a submissive, childlike character who is forced into a role that doesn't fit her or that she doesn't yet desire.

Worse yet, White explains that "since Royall has acted as Charity's father for most of her life, the marriage is incestuous" (228). This sick, incestuous marriage has a devastating effect on the reader. After the wedding night—once Wharton shows that lawyer Royall isn't going to force himself on Charity--the reader feels a slight sense of relief, as though there could be no better solution for Charity's situation. But a closer look shows the complete wretchedness of the situation. Wharton describes Charity's return to life as "painful" and the wedding vows as having a "dread sound of finality" (176, 182). After the wedding, Charity feels a "sharp sense of the irretrievable," and all her past power is replaced with the image of a "broken wing" (Wharton 184). There is nothing happy or joyous about her marriage to lawyer Royal. Charity is married to the old man that has always been her father figure, and, furthermore, she is stuck in North Dormer, the society that she had wanted so badly to escape. In the end, Charity "was someone to whom something irreparable and overwhelming *had happened*" (Wharton 180, emphasis added). The past perfect verb structure that Wharton uses summarizes the powers of society that Charity struggles to fight against but that eventually break her.

The explanation offered by Kathy Grafton that "Through her [Charity's] decision to have the baby she becomes proud and affirms her sexuality, no longer relying on the secrecy linked to her need for forbiddenness, but experiencing the relief of acceptance and openness" is completely refuted by the language surrounding Charity's marriage. She does not become proud and affirm her sexuality, nor does she experience the relief of acceptance and openness since she is forced to marry Royall out of a lack of options and in order to keep her secret a secret. The

language surrounding Charity does not illustrate relief but rather despair and brokenness. Furthermore, Walker's claim that "marriage to Royall, to whom she already feels somehow related, is the only natural" option is incorrect because it is Charity's *only* option (114). Critic Christine Rose, however, is correct when she notes, "although we may sympathize with his loneliness and need, we must despise him both for the threat of rape he represents and for his view of Charity as his possession. Lawyer Royall is *not* the hero at the end of the novel.

### Symbolism of Names

The names Wharton chooses for her characters highlight her critique of the roles that society and class dictated for both men and women. Both parts of lawyer Royall's name indicate his connection to power in the patriarchal society from which Charity longs to escape. His title of lawyer almost always precedes his name, and as a lawyer, he helps uphold the traditions that govern society. His last name, Royall, is also a symbol for his absolute rule in the hypocritical society of North Dormer. Wharton is expressly hinting at the rule lawyer Royall has; the word *royal* ultimately coming from the Latin *regalis*, which comes from *reg*, or *rex* meaning king and is defined as something "of or relating to a sovereign" (Royal 633). Both parts of lawyer Royall's name point to him as the most powerful person in the existing patriarchal society.

Lucius Harney's name is also of interest. As Peter L. Hays explains, "his first name, Lucius, is obviously derived from the Latin *lux* [meaning light], and he does enlighten her [with] his 'sudden smile that had shed its brightness over everything'" (17). Harney is the light that guides Charity as she experiences, although only briefly, freedom from the restraints of society. However, although Harney is the light in Charity's life, pushing her to a greater understanding of herself and of the world, he is still part of society.

As part of society, he cannot help but perpetuate patriarchal society that ultimately keeps both Charity and Harney from making choices. His profession, architect, hints at the way Harney helps to construct the stifling society that in the end neither he nor Charity can change. At one point, Harney shows an “expression of self-disgust, as if he hated himself and everything about him” (Wharton 67). He hates that he is powerless and unable to change the society that picks the girl most suitable for him to marry. Annabel Balch, a girl of his own class is “if not the girl Harney ought to marry, at least the kind of girl it would be natural for him to marry” (Wharton 143). Harney is only free to choose so long as he stays within the bounds of his social class. Grafton explains: “Harney does not feel as if Charity could possibly encumber the beautiful future he envisions for himself because, in the back of his mind, he knows that he will end up with a more ‘appropriate’ mate” (3). Harney is as helpless as Charity in choosing the things he wants for himself. He, too, must follow the rigid dictates that society has enumerated.

Even though the power that brings Charity and Harney together is “as far beyond resistance as a great gale loosening the leaves of the forest,” there is still standing “between them, fixed and upright in the general upheaval, the indestructible figure of Annabel Balch” (Wharton 150). Charity too, like Harney, understands the divisions of society and the way in which Annabel Balch represents the impossibility of the relationship. Walker states:

The distance between Charity and Annabel Balch emerges first in the fact that Charity usually thinks of her as “Miss Balch,” a habit of mind that reveals more than a difference of social class. Although Charity at one point quite literally wears Annabel’s shoes, Wharton makes it clear that Charity will never enter Annabel’s world of garden parties and concerts. Even before she realizes that Annabel and Lucius Harney are engaged, Charity senses that they belong to the same world and feels “the uselessness of stumbling

against the unseen influences in Harney's life" (p.66). Later Annabel comes to represent "all the things that Charity felt herself most incapable of understanding or achieving."

(111)

So, Charity, unconsciously and consistently, puts herself in a class lower than that of Annabel. Charity can never cross over into Annabel's world. Therefore, the correct path for a young man of Harney's birth and circumstance in society keeps Harney from ever possibly considering Charity as his wife. By the end of their relationship, both Harney and Charity feel as if they are "being sucked down together into some bottomless abyss" (Wharton 137). The uneducated, orphan girl and the cultured, well educated architect are helpless against the traditions of society.

Most interesting, however, is the name of Charity, given to her by lawyer Royall. Peter L. Hays explains that "Charity's name denotes the Latin *caritas* [meaning] dearness or high price, love, affection, esteem, dear one;" however, she is not "all these things to Royall who named her" (119). Wharton writes that Charity "had been christened Charity (in the white church at the other end of the village) to commemorate Mr. Royall's disinterestedness in 'bringing her down,' and to keep alive in her a becoming sense of her dependence" (Wharton 14). Her name, given to her in an institution of society, tries to shape Charity and keep her aware of her powerlessness. Not only that, but her "dependence" should be "becoming," a sign of the dominating society that surrounds her.

### **Explicit Symbols**

Nancy Walker claims that the library where Charity works "—a job for which [Charity] is ill-suited in education or temperament—represents Charity's trapped feeling at the beginning of the novel. It is described as a 'prison-house' (p.5), 'vault-like room' (p. 6), a 'mausoleum'

with a melancholy penumbra' (p. 34)" (Walker 109). However, more than just the library, Wharton uses reoccurring images of doors, thresholds, and gates to illustrate Charity's desire for freedom from her trapped feelings as well as her inability to move within the social confines of the time. Although Susan Hall points out a few references to the threshold, stating that "as often as she can, Charity escapes from the confinement of interior settings" (12) she fails to recognize Charity's *inability* to cross many thresholds and to connect these instances with her inability to escape society's constraints. The first time that we see Charity, she is standing on the doorstep of lawyer Royall's red house, ready to go out into the world (Wharton 3). From the beginning of the novel, Wharton makes it a point to illustrate Charity's desire to get out, to escape the stifling society that surrounds her. Charity wants something more than the women of her time can generally expect, as the women in the novel always seem to be "indoors, engaged in languid household drudgery" (Wharton 4). Hall writes that "it is obvious that she [Charity] wants to escape from North Dormer and from the fate of wife and mother which surely awaits her if she remains there" (Hall 12).

Unfortunately, Wharton shows how society will keep Charity in her proper sphere. At multiple times in the novel, someone comes between Charity as she tries to exit. Once, lawyer Royall "stood up and placed himself between her and the threshold" (Wharton 76). By blocking the door, he metaphorically helps to keep her in her proper place. It is only one page later that Charity again tries to exit the red house. This time Wharton explains: "She [Charity] went to the front door, and as she did so Lucius Harney opened it... 'are you going out?' he asked. 'May I come in?'" (77). Charity, of course, invites him in, but after Harney finishes his business with Charity, he is able to leave the house easily, and as he does so Charity "heard the closing of the outer door and the sound of his quick tread along the path. The latch of the gate clicked after

him” (Wharton 79). Consistently, the men in the novel keep Charity from achieving mobility, both literally and metaphorically. By the end of the novel, in the ultimate image of defeat, Charity is brought back to the place that she has been trying to escape from the beginning of the novel: “Late that evening, in the cold autumn moonlight, they drove up to the door of the red house” (Wharton 190). Lawyer Royall brings Charity back home, now as his wife, where she will inevitably experience the same stifling feelings that have dominated her throughout the novel. This same idea of marriage being stifling rather than fulfilling was just making its way into literature. Contemporaries such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman with *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and Kate Chopin with *The Awakening* (1899) also expressed frustration at being trapped in domesticity.

There is, however, one point in the novel where the ‘threshold’ seems to be a weaker image and easier for Charity to cross. Wharton describes the abandoned house where Charity experiences her sexual awakening: “Slender pilasters and an intricate fan-light framed the opening where the door had hung; and the door itself lay rotting in the grass, with an old apple-tree fallen across it” (107). The image of the rotting door helps illustrate Charity’s short experience with freedom. Here, Charity can come, and go, and make her own decisions. Furthermore, the door seems to be overtaken by an image from nature, an apple tree. It seems fitting that a natural object overtakes the door, just as Charity, whose own awakening is associated with natural images, temporarily feels free from the restrictions that usually force her to feel trapped.

Barbra A. White highlights another explicit symbol that is used throughout the novel: sea imagery. These symbols also illustrate the helplessness of Charity within the society that she lives. White explains:

This view of Charity as an essentially helpless being swept over, consumed, and burned by outbursts of passion is intensified by Wharton's use of sea imagery. Charity's feelings come in "waves," and as she fluctuates between joy and misery, her soul always seems to be "tossing" (p. 102). Several times in the novel she loses the sense of solid ground under her feet. The surrounding hills begin to look like the ocean, like "blue heights eddying away to the sky like the waves of a receding tide" (p. 79). In another instance, "aching with emotion, she stepped as if the ground were a sunlit wave and she the spray on its crest" (p. 96). (225)

The comparison between Charity's feelings and the ocean represent Charity's inability to feel secure, which is no fault of her own. The society that she was raised in did not give her a solid framework in which she could see herself and her decision.

Wharton also uses the symbol of the looking glass throughout the novel to illustrate Charity's awareness of her own beauty and appeal, and how it the only power that society has told her she has. Early in the novel Wharton writes: "A narrow greenish mirror with a gilt eagle over it hung on the passage wall, and she looked critically at her reflection" (Wharton 4). Charity examines herself critically because she knows it is where her power comes from. This is also illustrated when Charity asks lawyer Royall: "How long is it since you've looked at yourself in the glass?" She then straightens "herself, insolently conscious of her youth and strength" (Wharton 21). This exchange shows that Charity has internalized the idea that her sexual appeal is the only value she has. By the end of the novel, Wharton writes that "There was a looking-glass in a carved frame on the wall, but she [Charity] was ashamed to look at herself in it" (181). Now, Charity's power is completely gone because she has been "spoiled" in the eyes of society.

No one who knows what she did could honorably desire her. Charity is left feeling completely helpless.

### **Forever. . .**

“While nineteenth and twentieth century didactic novels were informing young men and women about the rules of society, America’s social, economic, and political climate was changing; an age was developing that would lead to the rise of American young adult literature.” (Tingen 14). Whereas *Summer* can be seen as one of the novels that informed young men and women about the rules of their society, *Forever* exemplifies a new genre, *young adult literature*, and the choices provided by American society during the 1970’s. Researcher Beth Younger points out that “Young adult literature...reflects societal stereotypes, and although literary critics often ignore this genre, it remains an important body of work that deserves our attention for not only whom it entertains, but also for what it says about the human condition” (summarized in Kaplin 1). Therefore, although from a somewhat different genre than *Summer*, one directed specifically to adolescent readers, Blume’s *Forever* can also be used as a representation of society—the cultural milieu— around the time it was written and the roles each sex had in society.

By 1975, the year Blume published *Forever*, multiple changes from Wharton’s time had taken place. Loretta Lynn celebrated “The Pill” in a country-western song, the surest sign that the times they were ‘a-changin’. Abortion and birth control had both become legal. Women had a place in both universities and careers. Blume’s novel *Forever* addresses these changes in the lives of women, but it also shows that new responsibilities accompanied them. Remarkably, 35 years have passed since this ground-breaking work, a novel that continues to provide sexual



education to many young people. Blume even accounts for the changes in sexual understanding and sexual responsibility since the book was written by adding a recent preface to her book:

When I wrote *Forever...* in the mid-seventies, sexual responsibility meant preventing unwanted pregnancy. Today, sexual responsibility also means preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including a potentially fatal one—HIV/AIDS. In the book, Katherine visits a clinic and is given a prescription for the Pill. Today, she would be told it is essential to use a latex condom along with any other method of contraception to reduce the risk of getting an STI. If you're going to become sexually active, then you must take responsibility for your own actions and your own life.

(Preface)

As our society continues to change and progress, Blume's novel maintains its power of teaching about the responsibilities of safe sex while simultaneously validating the presence of natural sexual desires by keeping up with what sexual responsibility looks like. The account of Kath's first experience with sex in *Forever* demonstrates Blume's dedication to both education and validation when it comes to sex.

### **An Explicit Sexual Awakening**

Much like *Summer*, Judy Blume's young adult novel *Forever* also tells the story of a young couple. Kath is a 17 year old senior in high school. On New Year's Eve, she meets Michael, also a senior, and the two teenagers start seeing each other often. As the two Kath and Michael become better friends, they also become more intimate. Their relationship moves from a little kiss to going "all the way." Kath's decision to have sex with Michael means the loss of her virginity. Unlike Wharton's novel, Blume uses explicit language to detail Kath's sexual

experiences. Her book is not filled with symbolism like Wharton's, but the choices her characters make and their mental reasoning show us the changes society has made since Wharton published *Summer*. Her decision to speak more candidly than Wharton did about sex, I think, comes from one of her major themes in the book, that is, the right of every person to make their own decisions. However, Blume also highlights the importance of education and having the right information when it comes to making important decisions.

The novel is certainly not, as Jennifer Kay Tingen claims, Blume warning "young adults of the dangers of sexual intercourse and the emotions that are sure to come along with it" (24). Nor does it show "how sex eclipsed other things that should have been important in Michael and Kath's lives" thus illustrating "teenage sexuality" (Tingen 21). The novel is, on the other hand, what Roberta Seelinger Trites claims when she "critiques *Forever* as a work that reinforces cultural sexual standards" of the time (qtd. in Younger 29). It is a close look at the events in the book that lead to the loss of Kath's virginity that illustrates these cultural sexual standards and the way Kath fits into her society. Her curiosity, resources, and options illustrate a society greatly changed from the time of Wharton. Blume asserts that the theme of the novel is not sexuality, but "making thoughtful choices regarding your life and taking responsibility for these choices" (Tingen 21). Therefore, the choices that Kath has the *opportunity* to make illustrate some of the changes in society between 1914 and 1975.

Although Kath is a virgin as the book opens, sex is an apparent theme from the first line of the novel: "Sybil Davison has a genius I.Q. and has been laid by at least six different guys" (Blume 1). For Kath and all her friends, sex is something that they think about and talk about often. It isn't hidden from her generation. Kath explains: "It's true that we are more open than our parents but that just means we accept sex and talk about it. It doesn't mean we are all

jumping into bed together” (Blume 34). From early in the book, Blume shows Kath’s self awareness and knowledge. Her decision to become sexually active is marked by thoughtful, responsible behavior. Blume does this to illustrate the way women could talk and know about sex as well as the way their sexual feelings could be validated and respected.

Importantly, Kath is curious. She craves to know and experience everything the world has to offer. This is also significant because society can honor and validate her curiosity more than it could in Charity’s time. Kath sees the world through critical eyes; she wants to understand things for herself. Blume illustrates this curiosity from the first time the couple meets. One of the first things Kath notices about Michael is the small mole on his cheek, and “for some crazy reason [she] thought about touching it” (Blume 2). As the relationship warms up, Kath’s curiosity is again apparent. The day after Kath meets Michael, they kiss for the first time. Kath explains that it was “warm, but not sloppy” (Blume, 10). Kath’s clear and implicit descriptions are reminiscent of a scientist cataloging observations. The curiosity and experimentation becomes clearer as Michael and Kath’s physical relationship quickly grows; Kath starts to explore and touch Michael’s body. Kath explains, “While I was experimenting, I asked, ‘Is this right?’” (Blume 71). Also, at one point, Kath closely examines Michael’s most private parts (Blume 130). As she does so, she compares how he and she are different. Again, Kath’s curiosity comes out, she wants to know and experiment with everything.

Through Kath, Blume illustrates the natural sexual curiosity that women have always possessed, but had been unable to explore due to a lack of education and socioeconomic freedom. Kath, on the other hand, seems to be educated and also able to afford help if she does become pregnant. Blume doesn’t pass judgment on Kath’s curiosity, but produces an honest representation of women’s sexual identities. Compared to Charity, Kath has the opportunity to be

curious, and to explore what intrigues her without needing to break the constraints of society. Charity's sexual awakening also awakens her curiosity; after having sex, Charity "had become absorbingly interesting to herself, and everything that had to do with her past was illuminated by this sudden curiosity" (Wharton 38). Unfortunately, Charity's curiosity cannot be validated, and her experiences bring harsh consequences. Kath, on the other hand, is only given more information with which to make decisions for the rest of her life.

Although Kath is ready and excited to experiment with her blossoming sexuality, she takes the decision seriously and wants to act responsibly. Kath realizes that it isn't "easy to stop," but she controls herself until she is ready to make the choice on her own (Blume 25). She declares to Michael, "I have to control my body with my mind" (Blume 46). At the start of her relationship with Michael, she consistently turns down his advances. One time, when Michael is pressuring Kath, she explains that she needs to be "mentally ready" before intercourse, that a person "has to think...a person has to be sure..." (Blume 46). For Kath, it isn't just about listening to her body and doing what feels good. Nancy E. Davis explains, "They [Michael and Kath] do not fall into bed the first time they meet, nor is sex the only aspect of their relationship. Instead, Blume shows us how the relationship develops and how Katherine slowly reaches her decision to sleep with Michael for the first time" (18). Kath considers both the possible consequences and effects sex will have on both her and Michael. For Kath, sexual experimentation is only okay when both partners are ready for it.

At one point, Kath also explains her decision to wait for love until she has sex to her friend Erica. In contrast, Erica claims that "you don't need love to have sex" (Blume 27). Determined to "get laid" before college, Erica begins seducing Michael's best friend, who turns out to be questioning his own sexuality and, therefore, proves a difficult target. Kath, unlike her

friend Erica, “want[s] it to be special” and wants to be in love before she will do it. The contemplation that Kath demonstrates when she observes other relationships also shows her maturity when it comes to intercourse. Kath analyzes aspects such as her parents’ relationship, realizing that although they fight, they genuinely like being together. Aware and sometimes embarrassed when she sometimes hears her parents make love, Kath respects and considers her parents’ relationship as she begins a romantic relationship for the first time.

Michael’s character is especially intriguing. He is much less responsible than Kath in his decisions regarding a physical relationship. Very early in the relationship, Michael asks Kath if she is a virgin. Kath explains to Michael that she is. As she reflects on the conversation, Kath thinks: “It occurred to me in the middle of the night that Michael asked if I was a virgin to find out what I expected of him. If I hadn’t been one then he probably would have made love to me. What scares me is I’m not sure how I feel about that” (Blume 20). Kath can tell that Michael would be more willing to have sex without strong emotions attached. Michael’s immaturity is even more apparent when he refuses to leave the room as Kath changes her shirt. Michael puts pressure on Kath asking her if she is “ashamed of her body” (Blume 37). After Kath turns around to change, Michael touches her breasts and begins kissing her neck. Kath protests, “please, Michael...don’t,” and Michael asks her, “why not?” (Blume 28). Her plea is only honored by Michael because Kath’s little sister has begun to knock on the door.

Because Michael is a forward, sexually minded character, he seems more like the men from *Summer*. The double standard that always existed never prohibited his sex from sexual experimentation. He also never seems to think about the potential consequences and choices of his actions. Nancy E. Davis illustrates this difference between Kath’s maturity and Michael’s immaturity. Davis explains, “The beautiful silver disk engraved with ‘Forever’ that Michael

gives to Katherine for her eighteenth birthday is in direct contrast to Katherine's decision to take the responsibility of birth control in her own hands and go to Planned Parenthood in New York to get the Pill. Michael's gift to Katherine is representative of the idealism of youth, while Katherine's 'gift' to Michael is indicative of the responsibilities of becoming an adult" (18).

When Kath thinks about being in bed with Michael, she has feelings of ambivalence, explaining "sometimes I want to so much—but other times I'm afraid" (Blume 58). Like Charity, Kath has to have something change in order to be ready to have sex with Michael. She has to be in love, and she needs to be loved back. The young couple goes to stay at his sister's house in Vermont to ski. Michael comes in to say goodnight to Kath. As Michael again touches Kath, she tells him "not to get too worked up," although she also recognizes her strong desires for Michael (Blume 59). This time Michael listens. He touches her face and says, "I love you, Katherine. I really mean it... I love you" (Blume 59). Kath doesn't instantly reply, but she thinks: "I could have said it back to him right away. I was thinking it all along. I was thinking, *I love you, Michael*. But can you really love someone you've seen just nineteen times in your life?" (59). Kath is guarded and won't give anything away easily. The next time it comes up, however, Kath is ready to tell Michael she loves him. Blume writes:

"Remember last night when I said I loved you?"

"Yes."

"Well...I mean it ...it's not just the sex thing...that's part of it...but it's more than that...you know?"

"I know...because I love you too," I whispered into his chest. Saying it the first time was the hardest. There's something so final about it. The second time I sat up and said it right to him. "I love you, Michael Wagner."

“Forever?” He asked.

“Forever,” I said. (72).

It is soon after this conversation the Kath and Michael together decide to go all the way.

Kath and Michael’s sexual relationship is much more explicit than the relationship of Charity and Harney in *Summer*. Blume’s sexual descriptions are clear and straightforward, as opposed to the roundabout speech of Wharton. This is, in part, due to the new independence women gained with regard to sexual knowledge and freedom. Kath and Michael’s first full sexual encounter illustrates the explicit descriptions Blume uses. Blume writes:

This time I tried to relax and think of nothing—nothing but how my body felt—  
and then Ralph was pushing against me and I whispered, “are you in... are we doing it?”

“Not yet,” Michael said, pushing harder. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Don’t worry...just do it!”

“I’m trying, Kath...but it’s very tight in there.”

“What should I do?”

“Can you spread you legs some more...any maybe raise them a little?”

“Like this?”

“That’s better...much better.”

I could feel him halfway inside me and then Michael whispered, “Kath...”

“What?”

“I think I’m going to come again.”

I felt a big thrust, followed by a quick sharp pain that made me suck in my breath.

“Oh...oh,” Michael cried, but I didn’t come. I wasn’t even close. (97)

Blume's language leaves little to the imagination. She speaks clearly and honestly about what a first time experience might be like. She uses common terminology throughout the book for sexual functions and shows the reader the character's thoughts as the event is happening. Blume's novel reads more like a how-to book for a first time couple than Wharton's implicit hints at intercourse.

Furthermore, Blume illustrates the challenges that come with a sexual relationship. Blume has Kath experience the letdowns that can accompany sex in order to give an honest portrayal of what a woman's sexual experience might really be like. When first she consents, Michael comes before he can attempt to penetrate. When they do try again (previous quote), Kath experiences only pain. Kath says to Michael, "Everybody says the first time is no good for a virgin. I'm not disappointed" (Blume 97). But that isn't the way she really felt. Inside she thinks, "But I was. I'd wanted it to be perfect" (Blume 97). Once alone on the way home, she again considers her disappointment. She thinks:

I am no longer a virgin. I'll never have to go through the first-time business again and I'm glad—I'm so glad it's over! Still, I can't help feeling let down. Everybody makes such a big thing out of actually doing it. But Michael is probably right—this takes practice. I can't imagine what the first time would be like with someone you didn't love. (Blume 97-98).

Kath feels disappointment after giving up her virginity, but this explicit expression of emotions validates her sexual feelings as a female. Eventually, Kath and Michael do reach a point where both experience orgasm. Younger explains that these "the depictions of Katherine's sexual pleasure function as a resistance to male-dominated sexuality" (Younger 127). Kath's thoughts and ideas, both positive and negative, give validation to the fact that women have sexual



feelings, instead of making women seem only like objects that provide males with sexual fulfillment.

### **Consequences of the Awakening**

An important difference between Charity's sexual awakening and Kath's awakening is that in the end, Charity is pregnant and without options, while Kath doesn't get pregnant and has many important choices ahead of her, including a university education and a career. The lack of a pregnancy at the end of *Forever* is intentional. The novel fights against a long tradition of books like *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones* by Ann Head, where any teen promiscuity will certainly end in the female becoming pregnant. Such is the case in Head's novel. The young woman's sexual feelings are never validated and readers are left with the message that intercourse is bad and can bring only unhappiness.

On her website, Blume explains exactly why Kath does *not* end up pregnant and why *Forever* is dedicated to her daughter. Blume writes:

My daughter Randy asked for a story about two nice kids who have sex without either of them having to die. She had read several novels about teenagers in love. If they had sex the girl was always punished—an unplanned pregnancy, a hasty trip to a relative in another state, a grisly abortion (illegal in the U.S. until the 1970's), sometimes even death. Lies. Secrets. At least one life ruined. Girls in these books had no sexual feelings and boys had no feelings other than sexual. Neither took responsibility for their actions. I wanted to present another kind of story—one in which two seniors in high school fall in love, decide together to have sex, and act responsibly. ([Judy Blume on the Web](#))

So, Kath doesn't get pregnant because she acts responsibly. Blume paints Kath as mature enough to responsibly love her boyfriend. This responsibility is shown through Kath's visit to the Margaret Sanger Clinic in New York City (ironically, the same one that opened the year Wharton wrote *Summer*), to learn about birth control. The dialogue during the doctor visit is explicitly clear and completely Judy Blume. The doctor asks Kath questions about her period, how often she plans on having intercourse, and what form of birth control she has used. During the physical portion of the doctor visit, Kath recounts: "Then he slipped this cold thing into my vagina and explained, 'This is a vaginal speculum. It holds the walls of the vagina open so that the inside is easily seen. Would you like to see your cervix?'" (Blume 120). The doctor visit helps validate Kath's sexual feelings but also educates her about sex as well as her own body.

By including the Margaret Sanger visit with the clear conversation between Kath and the doctor, Blume shows what being sexually responsible looks and feels like. Not only does she validate the sexual feelings of both Kath and Michael, but she also includes a close look at the options that can help keep the girl from having a "ruined life" for her choice to be sexually active. This honest representation is one of the reasons the book has been so popular; it is a classic for coming of age women. It is also the reason the book has so many opponents and has been censored so often.

There is still, however, one example of a teen pregnancy in *Forever*. Near the end of the story, we find out that Sybil, the girl from the first line of the novel, is pregnant and perhaps does not have a genius IQ after all. Sybil wants to have the baby, so she doesn't tell her parents she is pregnant because they will make her have an abortion. She becomes an example of what sexual responsibility does not look like. Sybil's pregnancy does, however, illustrate one change in society, abortion. Sybil's pregnancy gets Kath and Erica talking. Kath asks, "I'd have an

abortion...wouldn't you?" To which Erica replies, "In a minute" (Blume 136). The option of abortion in America was an incredibly recent development. *Roe vs. Wade* was passed on January 22, 1973, just two years before Blume published *Forever*, and the issue was a major victory for women's rights activists.

Still, Blume is fair by portraying both sides. She doesn't say that an abortion is always the right answer, because Sybil chooses to have her baby and then to give the baby up. Sybil states, "I could have had an abortion, but I wanted the experience of giving birth" (158). Blume again shows the importance of choice. Nevertheless, Sybil shows her emotions after she has her baby and then realizes how hard it will actually be to give the baby up. "It's not like I could keep her...that wouldn't be fair..."(158). The double-sided discussion of abortion is the polar opposite of the discussion in *Summer*, written at a time when abortion was illegal and the procedure could very likely be dangerous and done by someone extremely under qualified, a quack.

### **Implicit Signs of Open Doors**

The explicit and implicit contrast is seen in more than just the comparison of sexual language. Where Wharton used explicit repetition of doors and mirrors to show how society kept young Charity trapped in a world of patriarchy, Blume uses implicit suggestions to show how the patriarchal society had changed and women during her time had more options than in the past. For example, the lawyer in *Forever* is not the educated male that society permits into a position of power. In Blume's novel, Hallie Gross, Kath's grandmother, is a lawyer, as is her grandfather; consequently, Gross draws attention to the new options women have achieved.

At the point in Hallie's life that the novel portrays, Hallie works beyond the realm of law; Kath explains that her grandmother "is too busy with politics and Planned Parenthood and NOW

to see many clients” (Blume 22). Hallie Gross is involved with promoting the options afforded to women. It is significant that Hallie is one of the first people with whom Kath talks about sex. As soon as Grandmother Hallie meets Michael, she gives Kath a warning:

“Just be careful...that’s my only advice.”

“Of what?”

“Pregnancy.”

“Grandma!”

“And venereal disease.”

“Really...”

“Does it embarrass you to talk about it?”

“No, but...”

“It shouldn’t.”

“But listen, Grandma...we aren’t sleeping together.”

“Yet,” Grandma said. (Blume 33-4)

Hallie is the first adult to talk about sex with Kath as well as the first one to anticipate what is coming. As Kath and Michael’s relationship progresses, Grandma sends Kath some “pamphlets from Planned Parenthood on birth control, abortion and venereal disease,” which Kath finds to be “valuable information” (Blume 109). Grandma Hallie wants Kath to have the right information as she makes her decisions, but she doesn’t choose what Kath will ultimately do. At no point in the novel does Hallie try to force her beliefs on Kath.

Erica’s mother, Mrs. Small, is also a successful, professional woman who works as a movie reviewer. Kath explains that: “She acts like a regular person. You would never know she’s famous” (Blume 112). Kath’s innocent comment highlights the way everyday women around

Kath are able to be successful in more than just the home. Sharon, Michael's sister, is another example of a successful woman, another instance of an open door. Michael explains that Sharon is "an anthropologist, working for the museum of Natural History, but she hopes to go on a field trip soon" (Blume 112).

There are still, however, remnants of Charity's culture in Kath's society. Not many women have stepped into the working world. When Kath hears Michael explain what Sharon does, Kath asks Sharon "if she'd be a speaker at our Career Day program in April, because most kids don't get to meet anthropologist every day" (Blume 57). Sharon replies that she would like to participate in Career Day. Kath thinks: "My guidance counselor, Mrs. Handelsman, will be pleased since she's having trouble finding enough interesting speakers, *especially young women*" (Blume 57, emphasis added). Even fifty years after the publication of *Summer*, women are still slowly working towards the same opportunities and choices men have had all along.

### Endings

Although novels similarly end with the young couples apart, a key difference between *Forever* and *Summer* is their endings and what events make the endings possible. Throughout the novel, Kath's coming of age is marked by strong reflection and change. This reflection is first seen when Kath's girlfriend Erica pesters Kath about Michael. Erica asks "Is he any good? Do you love him?" Kath doesn't respond, but thinks: "I wasn't going to say I loved Michael yet. I was too quick to think I'd loved Tommy Aronson and he and I never even got to be friends. I already knew Michael better than I'd ever known Tommy. And the way I'd felt about Tommy last year was nothing compared to what I felt for Michael" (Blume 27). Kath's thoughts show the way she uses her past experiences and choices to inform her future. At another point in the story,

Kath's little sister Jamie claims she has fallen in love but that "it doesn't matter to her that she won't see David for seven weeks, which proves that love at thirteen is nothing like love at eighteen"(Blume 134).

Kath's thought is especially telling because it highlights the fact that she is aware of the changes that occur as people grow up. She again experiences change when she meets Theo while she is away for the summer teaching tennis at Jamie's summer camp. At first, Kath is determined to be with Michael forever, and she tries to ignore the fact that Theo is always looking at her, and that she likes it. In the meantime, Theo and Kath become good friends and help to take care of each other during the summer, but when Kath sees Michael next, she realizes that her feelings for him have changed, and that maybe she was too young to commit for forever. In the end, Kath and Michael have a screaming fight and break up. But the last page of the novel is only hopeful. Kath runs into Michael and feels the difficulty of saying what she really wants. Kath explains:

I wanted to tell him that I will never be sorry for loving him. That in a way I still do—that maybe I always will. I'll never regret one single thing we did together because what we had was very special. Maybe if we were ten years older it would have worked out differently. Maybe. I think it's just that I'm not ready for forever. (Blume 192)

Kath comes home feeling blue after running into Michael; her mom asks:

"Are you all right... you don't look well..."

"I've had better days...but I'm okay. I think I'll take a shower before dinner."

"Go ahead...and Kath..."

"Yes?"

"Theo called." (Blume 192)

And so the novel ends in the classic way for a young adult novel. Richard Peck, another young adult novelist, explains that “the last page of every YA novel should say not, ‘The End’ but ‘The Beginning’” (qtd. in Nilsen 4). At the end of the novel, Kath is looking forward to the rest of her life and possible future relationships. The moral lesson that Blume leaves is that it is okay to love in a responsible way. Davis explains, “Blume did not write *Forever* as a treatise encouraging young people to experiment with pre-marital sex” (19). Instead *Forever* shows what experiencing love for the first time can look and feel like. *Forever* gives something for young people to relate to as they grow up. It shows that young people will certainly have a first love, but that might not be the relationship that lasts forever, and that’s okay. There is nothing final about the ending in *Forever*. This is the difference between *Summer* and *Forever*. Charity comes back to the house with the red door to feelings of finality, feelings that her life is truly over. Wharton’s message is not one of caution against having pre-marital sex; the message is of the impossibility of a woman being independent under the current social order. Charity’s whole life, or the period of her life where she could make her own choices, is finished. It lasted as long as the title explains, one *summer*. Kath, on the other hand, grows up during a different era, and her society allows her to keep making choices and controlling her life *forever*.

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### **Author's Biography**

Katie Fredrickson grew up in Bountiful, Utah, and graduated from Woods Cross High School in 2006. Soon after, she moved to Logan, Utah, and began her career at Utah State University as a Presidential Scholar. Katie studied English and Spanish Education with the hope of becoming a teacher. She has always had a passion for reading and writing. While at Utah State, Katie participated in the Honors Program, graduating with departmental honors in English. Katie studied abroad in Mexico and volunteered to teach English in Chile. Katie further demonstrated her dedication to service by serving as the Storytellers Director. During her time as a service director, Katie promoted literacy in Cache Valley by holding Family Reading Day at Hyrum Library and working with local elementary schools to host literacy fairs. Katie also worked as an undergraduate research assistant on a Langston Hughes project under the direction of Dr. Shane Graham. Katie was recognized by her professors at Utah State as the English Education Student of the Year in 2009. While an Aggie, Katie also worked as a Rhetoric Associate and at Great Harvest Bread Co. In the spring of her last semester, she was awarded the first Joyce Kinkead Outstanding Honors Scholar award. After she graduates, she plans on pursuing a Masters Degree in Education, focusing specifically on literacy.